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Parts of Oswego park potentially unsafe: report

Inspector urges restricted access to Saw-Wee-Kee

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Oswego

A U.S. government official has found that some areas of Saw-Wee-Kee Park have debris that could be dangerous, and has urged that public access to those areas be restricted.

Oswegoland Park District officials, who heard Inspector Louise Fabinski's report Thursday, said they would put up warning signs in the park but would consult with the Illinois attorney general's office before taking any other action.

For at least five years, the park district had been putting fill into a low area of Saw-Wee-Kee, a 150-acre recreation area southwest of here once used as a gravel strip-mine and municipal dump. Fabinski, who works in the federal government's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, told the board she found empty drums, empty fungicide containers, telephone poles, broken glass and medical debris in parts of the park. She

said the debris could become a health threat.

Recommending that access to those areas be restricted, Fabinski also urged further study of the debris and continued monitoring of the groundwater.

Fabinski said she was disappointed that the board had not acted on her report, which she said she submitted to the board in May. The board, by not limiting access to the potentially dangerous areas of the park, would be legally liable, she said.

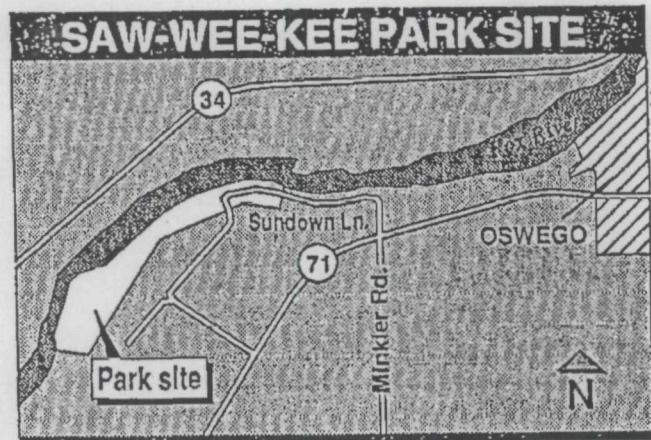
The park, on the east side of the Fox River off Route 71, is used for hiking, horseback riding and canoeing. The area in question is along 10 to 15 acres of hiking and horseback riding trails in the park.

Park District Executive Director Bert Gray said the district wants to consult with the attorney general because several governmental agencies have investigated the site and have made other findings and recommendations.

Fabinski called the actions the park district has taken "minimal." She expressed concern that the park district continues to encourage use of the park's trails.

Gray disputed Fabinski's remarks, saying the park district has spent almost \$100,000 since January 1991 on cleaning up the park

◆ See Park on page A3



Beacon-News graphic

Park

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Gray said signs would be put up along Saw-Wee-Kee's trails to warn people of the potential dangers. Fabinski said the signs are a good idea, but that more should be done.

Gray called Fabinski's report thorough and fair, but said he wondered why other agencies that inspected the site did not recommend that the park district take such actions.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency told the park district it found no

hazardous material at the dumping site. The agency cleared the way for the park district to get a permit to continuing putting in fill at the site.

In January, an appellate court agreed with a lower court ruling that allowed the park district to continuing filling. The appellate court concluded that two residents whose homes abut the park "failed to establish that (the district's) conduct harmed them or their property" or that they were "exposed to any grave or immediate peril." The residents had sued for an injunction to stop dumping in the park, and to prevent the park district from developing the park until groundwater tests had been done.